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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2011

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 17, 2011, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Kathryn Corr of the Lazy Magnolia Brewing Co. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, March 16**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

LUNCHEON SPEAKERS

If you know of anyone who would be a good speaker and have contact information for this person, please call the Society at 467-4090.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2011. If you are unsure about whether your fees are due, check the date on your address label. This date is your expiration date. The price of membership is twenty-five (\$25) per year.



Eliza Poitevent
Nicholson

(03/11/1843—
02/15/1896)

Eliza Poitevent Nicholson A Woman Ahead of Her Time

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

In 1894 a group of tourists traveled by rail along the Gulf of Mexico from New Orleans, LA, to Mobile, AL. A travelogue of their experiences in these cities as well as photographs of various sites of interest to them was published by the L & N Railroad under the title *Along the Gulf*. In addition to their experiences in these cities

and photographs of various sites of interest, author Charles L. Dyer included vignettes of prominent citizens of the areas. The following excerpt gives a brief narrative of Eliza Poitevent Nicholson. [To maintain the tone and voice of the piece, I have edited very little with the exception of punctuation. ed.)

“One of the most noted residents of Waveland is Mrs. Eliza J. Nicholson—better known under the *nom de plume* of ‘Pearl Rivers’—the proprietor of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, one of the most popular and powerful

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
Pat Fuchs, PublisherPublished monthly by the
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journals in the South. Mrs. Nicholson's summer home, called 'Fort Nicholson,' is situated on the beach of Waveland, near Nicholson Avenue, overlooking the Bay of St. Louis [actually the Mississippi Sound ed.]. The spacious house is of modern architecture, with broad galleries surrounding, and is in the center of a beautiful lawn with winding, shell-bedded drives on either side.

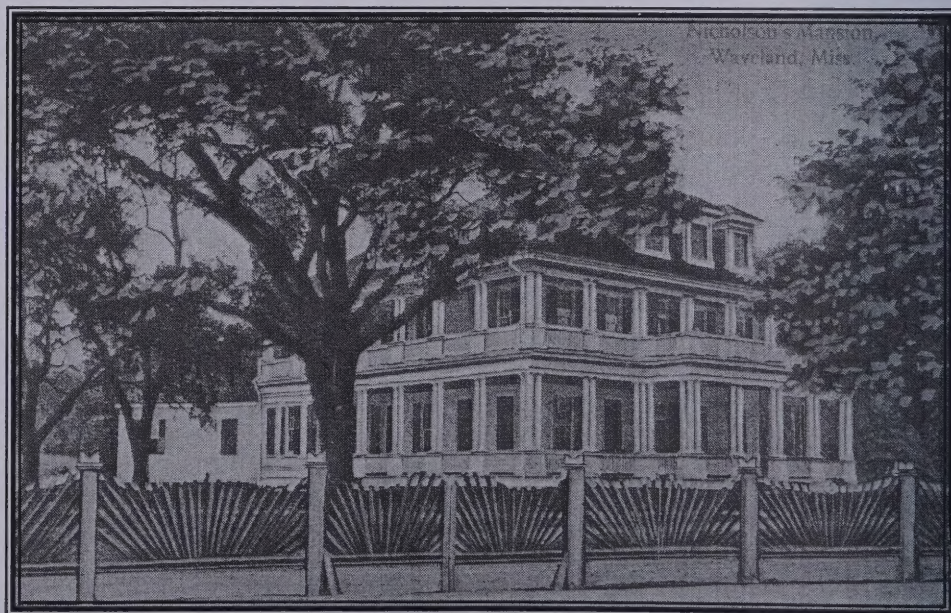
"Mrs. Nicholson's girlhood life was spent in a rambling old country house, near the brown waters of the Pearl River. She was the only child on the place; a lonesome child with the heart of a poet, she took to the beautiful Southern woods and made them her sanctuary. A born poet, it was not long before she found her voice and began to sing, full and sweet, the fairy stories of the woods. These songs reached out in the world, and the wise and gray heads of

other poets were listeners to the little one's songs of nature.

"She became a contributor to the New York *Home Journal* and other papers of high standing, and the name of 'Pearl Rivers' became one that is held dear by the many who have read her exquisite verse. She is the poet laureate of the birds and flowers of the South. Her poems and fantasies of the birds and flowers of the pine scented Mississippi woodlands are the very airy ephemera and cobweb daintiness of poetic thought—so dainty are some of them that they might have been etched with a thorn on the petal of a dog rose bloom.

"'Pearl Rivers' first published article was accepted by Mr. John W. Overall, now editor of the New York *Mercury*, from whom she received the confirmation of her own hope that she was born to be a writer.

"While still living in the



Fort Nicholson—home of Eliza Poitevent and George Nicholson
615 North Beach Blvd., Waveland

country the free, luxurious life of the daughter of a wealthy Southern gentleman, Miss Poitevent received an invitation from the editor of the *Picayune* to come to New Orleans as the literary editor of his paper. A newspaper woman was then unheard of in the South, and it is pleasant to know that the foremost woman editor of the South today was also the South's pioneer woman journalist.

"Miss Poitevent went on the staff of the *Picayune* with a salary of \$25 a week. The work suited her, and she found herself possessed of that rare faculty in woman—the journalistic faculty.

"After a time, she married the owner of the *Picayune* [Alva M. Holbrook]. When he died, she found herself with nothing but a big, unwieldy newspaper, almost swamped in a sea of debt. The idea of turning her back on this new duty did not occur to the new owner. She gathered about her a brilliant staff of writers, went faithfully and patiently to her 'desk's dead wood,' worked early and late, was both economical and enterprising, and after years of struggle won her battle and made her paper a foremost power in the South, yielding her a handsome, steady income. To those in her employ she is always kind and courteous, and her staff honor her and work for her with enthusiasm. Of late years the cares of conducting a great journal have made the composition of much poetry impossible, but Pearl Rivers has found time to write two grand poems that have received the highest praise from eminent

critics. They are 'Hagar' and 'Leah,' noted for their strength in narration and beauty of language, and are destined to live in literature. In 1878 Pearl Rivers married Mr. George Nicholson, and in their hospitable and happy home are the poems of which this gentle poet is proudest—her two sons, Leonard and Yorke.

Mr. George Nicholson is a native of Leeds, England. He came to New Orleans in 1842 and shortly afterward went into the service of the *Picayune*, first as carrier and assistant mail clerk and successfully served as counter clerk, collector, and cashier. He was afterward made business manager, continuing under all the administrations of the paper. He finally became part owner of the paper and by his marriage with Mrs. Nicholson became associated with his wife in the publication of the *Daily and Weekly Picayune* under the firm name of Nicholson & Co."

Eliza Poitevent Nicholson died of influenza in New Orleans at age fifty-two on February 15, 1896, the same illness to which her husband had succumbed just two weeks earlier.

SOURCES:

Dyer, Charles Lawrence. *Along the Gulf*. New Orleans: William E. Myers, Pub., 1894; Gulfport, MS: The Dixie Press, 1971.

Wicks, Don. "Pearl Rivers," *Mississippi Writers & Musicians*. 23 Dec. 2010. 3 Aug. 2008 <<http://mswritersandmusicians.com/writers/pearl-rivers>>.

Belle Fontaine ...a Speculation

By
Russell Guerin

I want to believe that certain old maps of the coastal area are correct in showing a "belle fontaine" near the Bay of St. Louis. Furthermore, I want to believe that it was located near the Indian mound near the foot of the Highway 90 bridge. The location of a fresh water spring surely would have had great importance in the planning of the site of a proposed settlement.

Even before the settlement of the area by French and Canadians, an Indian midden was built near the site. It is believed by archaeologists who have studied the area that many years ago there existed around the mound an entire village of Native Americans. It goes without saying that such a fresh water source would have been vital to the selection of a site by these predecessors. Pottery shards found at the midden date back to the Marksville Period between 200 B.C. and 400 A.D.

I have had help in drawing this conclusion in the form of a wonderfully detailed 1857 map of the Bay of St. Louis and Shieldsboro Harbor, commissioned by the United States government. From this source, a network of canals and natural drainage streams seem to empty into the sound at the same location as that one mentioned above.

Sometimes, what we want to believe colors the evi-

dence, but Andre Penicaut, in his history entitled *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, seems to have confirmed the presence of such a natural flow of water at the spot that eventually became Bay St. Louis. Having travelled with Iberville and Bienville from the beginning of their explorations, he recorded that they "slept at the entrance of the bay, close by a spring of fresh water that flows down from the mountains and that nowadays is called La Belle Fontaine."

A footnote in Penicaut's history by editor Richebourg Gailard McWilliams gives the meaning of the word *fontaine* to be a "small creek or spring" and refers to Jean Baptiste D'Anville's "Carte de la Louisiane." The historical society's map book, plate 24, contains a copy of D'Anville's 1752 map, clearly showing the location of "Fontaine" at the western side of the bay. Another map I have seen indicates the same placement and uses the phrase "Belle Fontaine."

McWilliams points out that there are other "belle fontaines" at Pascagoula and Mobile and expresses doubt about the Bay St. Louis location. However, in view of Penicaut's detailed description of the geography of the area, it is difficult for me to have any second thoughts, except for a possible inaccuracy on the part of Penicaut's reporting of "three leagues." What he wrote was as follows: "The next day, leaving Isle-aux-Pois [Pea Island], we passed through some little rigolets, which end up at the sea three leagues away, near Baye de St. Louis." A careful reading shows that the "little rigolets" was not the main connection between

Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne that today we call the Rigolets, but the mouth of the Pearl River, "whose water is good to drink."

Using the measurement of three miles to the league, Penicaut would put the bay only about nine miles from Pea Island, shown on modern maps as Pearl River Island, whereas it is at least twelve miles distant. Such a discrepancy is easily forgiven considering that the method of calculating involved some guesswork. All in all, it seems to me that Penicaut's words are very clear.

I have rethought an earlier conclusion which I had made concerning the location of "belle fontaine." J.F.H. Claiborne also recorded Bienville camping "at the entrance of Bay St. Louis, near a fountain of water that flows from the hills, which M. de Bienville named Belle Fontaine." In itself, that entry gives no problem. The difficulty comes, however, in a footnote saying, "the present beautiful residence of W. A. Whitfield, Esq., known as the 'Shelley Nurseries.'"

My error was confusing the Whitfield place with one that, I am told, was at one time near the foot of the bridge. We have a file at the historical society which gives a clear location and description of Mr. Whitfield's plantation. It was located on the north side of the bay in Harrison County on or near a shell midden, a place where formerly was a hotel (Pine Hills), which later became a seminary, and is now Dupont. It has become clear that Claiborne was referring to this location.

As the Whitfield place also had a flowing artesian well, it also was called, at least by some, "Belle Fontaine," but was better known as "the Shell Bank Plantation," or simply, "Shelly."

On balance, there is little doubt that the observation made by Penicaut and Bienville was a forecast of the eventual planting of a settlement at this strategic location that is now the city of Bay St. Louis.



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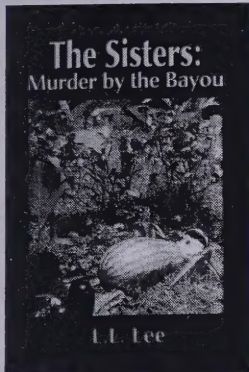
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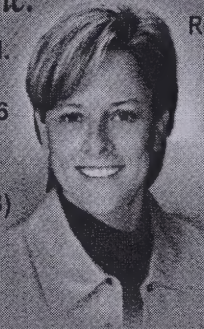
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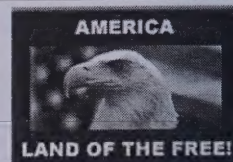
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